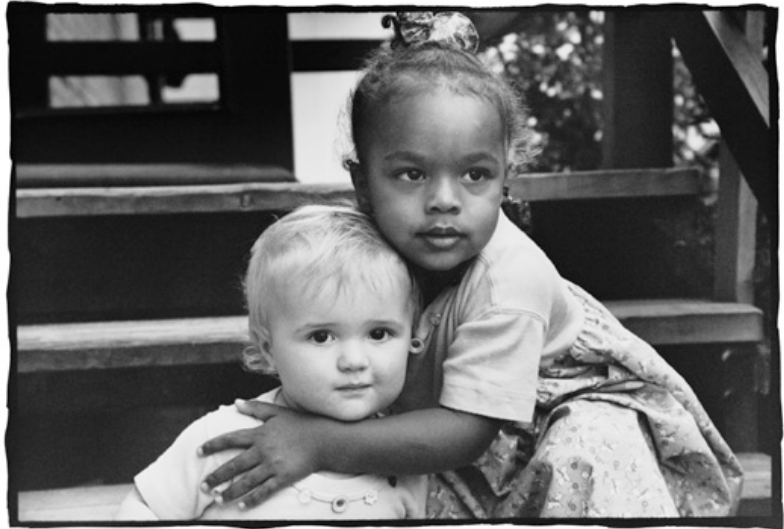


EDUCARE

Chicago ♦ Omaha ♦ Milwaukee ♦ Tulsa ♦ Denver ♦ Oklahoma City
Miami ♦ Seattle ♦ Yakima ♦ Arizona building partnerships in 2007

What: State-of-the art early childhood centers open full-day and full-year, with a BA-degreed teacher in every classroom, working together in a growing network to advance quality in their own states and across the country.

Each Educare Center serves 150-200 of their community's at-risk children (from birth to 5 years) and their families. Each aims to follow the ground-breaking Educare model of quality developed by Chicago's nationally respected Ounce of Prevention Fund in spring 2000.



Educare Centers, where infants and toddlers form roughly a third of the enrollment, are designed to meet the needs of today's families who are making the transition from welfare to work and are recipients of a mix of Head Start, child care and preschool services. Each classroom provides a BA-degreed teacher, an assistant teacher with an AA degree, and an aide from the community. All classrooms are supervised by teachers with Master's degrees in early childhood. In addition, each Educare Center employs family support staff and social workers to ensure that each family's comprehensive needs are addressed.

Our aim is to create 12-15 Educare Centers in a 10-12 state consortium. Together, we seek to dramatically improve "quality" in programming and to use Educare as a platform for broader policy change.

Why: Children from economically disadvantaged homes too often arrive poorly prepared for kindergarten and require significant and costly concentration of K-12 resources to provide them with equal educational opportunity.

The current shortage of quality early care and education for the poor is not only wrong, but fiscally unwise. Studies show \$1 invested wisely in early childhood saves many dollars later. Each Educare Center is participating in a nationally significant project to emphasize to policymakers that the first five years of life are crucial to emotional well-being, the formation of curiosity, the ability to learn, and future success in school. For families to be successful, parents and young children need support and access to high quality learning experiences from the prenatal period through their transition into school.



How: Private dollars build the building, but not until an Educare contract is signed to build the operating budget through cross-organizational partnership. The facility intentionally is designed to rival corporate child care centers in quality – leveling the playing field across economic lines in the same way public school kindergartens attempt to do.

The building also serves as a catalyst: school districts, state governments and Head Start/Early Head Start grantees must be willing to blend multiple public funding streams into one facility and forge a plan for working together. Only through collaborative partnership can there be an operating budget robust enough to support certified teachers, low child/staff ratios and small class sizes. Private dollars supplement the publicly funded operating budget to reach the Educare-levels of quality science shows is needed.

The Educare movement is led by the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, the Ounce of Prevention Fund and public-private partners in communities across America. More leadership is welcome. The work of the Ounce is supported by its board of directors, private foundations and, most importantly, its late founder, Irving Harris, whose foundation remains active in early childhood poverty intervention. Anchor funders for Educare Centers in other communities include the Buffetts in Omaha and Milwaukee, businessman and philanthropist George Kaiser in Tulsa, the Chambers Family Fund in Denver, the Inasmuch Foundation in Oklahoma City, and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in two communities in Washington State. In addition, the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, the Irving Harris Foundation and the George Kaiser Family Foundation (a part of the Tulsa Community Foundation) provide capital grants to encourage steady growth of the network, one state and one high-quality Educare Center at a time. The Buffetts and the Ounce also provide continuing technical assistance and consultation to each center's development and overall implementation within the network. As another way of sharing lessons throughout the network while improving quality with each new center, the architectural design firm RDG provides consultation on building design to emerging Educare communities. Joining the Buffetts in supporting the network's operation and development are the Pritzker Early Childhood Foundation and the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation.



Water play at Educare of Omaha

Educare seeks to take the nation's best early childhood research from the lab to the street. Under the name Bounce Learning Network of Educare Centers, key partners from all participating communities gather for regular conferences to learn from each other's experience. Essentially, we're taking all of the great research studies – Abecedarian, Perry Preschool, the National Early Head Start Evaluation and others – and implementing them in the real world. We're seeking to narrow the gap between "what we know" from the research and "what we do" in early childhood programming and policy by implementing with rigor and purpose. By knitting together lessons from research with all available public funding, we expect to improve quality, generate the biggest "return" on our investments, and sustain our work over time. Ultimately, we hope to produce a dramatically new standard of effectiveness for children living in and near poverty – a "Head Start to the second power" – which delivers long-term gains. The research proves such gains are possible.

Where and When: Educare of Chicago began planning in 1997 and opened in 2000. Educare of Omaha began planning in 2000 and opened in 2003. Educare of Milwaukee began planning late in 2001 and opened in 2005. Educare of Tulsa began planning in 2003 and opened in 2006. Educare of Denver began planning in 2003 and opens in 2007. Educare of Oklahoma City will break ground in 2007, as well. What's more, second Educare Centers in Omaha and Tulsa will break ground in 2008. Also, Educare of Seattle is expected to break ground in 2008. Conversations are underway in several other states seeking to build partnerships, build centers and join the network. Four of the six current network members completed land deals with the local public schools, allowing Educare to be adjacent to a center-city school.

The latest of these is Educare of Oklahoma City, which will open in 2009. The oldest, in Chicago, is situated between an elementary school and a high school. The Educare Centers in Omaha and Tulsa also stand beside elementary schools, sending a strong signal that children are learning from birth. Educare can also be tailored to meet local needs: the Tulsa center includes an on-site health clinic; the Milwaukee center is adjacent to a non-profit that includes an on-site clinic; the Denver center stands beside a teacher training institute on the historic Clayton Foundation campus as part of an innovative pre-birth to 5th grade effort with the Denver Public Schools. Educare Centers are best built as close as possible to their target population: children at risk of school failure and families making the transition from welfare to work.



Educare of Tulsa

Beginning Early with Prenatal Services: Because of the importance of beginning intervention early, before children are born, Educare emphasizes the integration of prenatal services.

A focus on prenatal services is a hallmark of the nation's Early Head Start program. Educare Centers seek to build on this foundation; some are exploring a model approach to providing prenatal, intrapartum, and postpartum support called the Community Doula Program. "Doulas" are carefully selected and well-trained women from the community who provide continuous emotional support and guidance to mothers during the period surrounding the birth of their babies. This intervention has demonstrated significant health benefits to mothers and babies, and leads to higher breastfeeding rates and better mother-child interaction.

Parental Involvement: Parents are expected to play an active part in the life and governance of Educare, even as they learn to balance the demands of school or work with those of parenting.

Building on what research shows about the benefits of providing comprehensive services, each center will employ five to seven family support specialists to help strengthen the relationship between parent and child, ease the transition from welfare to work, and overcome threats to health and safety beyond the center.

Parents sometimes pay a fee for Educare, on a sliding scale recognizing ability to pay. The network embraces the idea that children of different socio-economic standings can learn and play together. One third of the space in each center – and one third of the operating budget – is devoted to adults, from parenting activities in the training center or the classroom to family support and referral.

Staffing: Educare attempts to bring a professional career ladder to a very challenging task: preparing our neediest children to succeed by the time they enter kindergarten.

Each classroom houses a three-adult team: a teacher with a four-year degree in early childhood, an assistant teacher with a two-year degree in early childhood, and an aide from the community. Pay scales reward advancement. Aides are encouraged to continue their education to become assistant teachers, who are in turn encouraged to become teachers. Infant-toddler classrooms serve eight children; preschool classrooms serve 17 children. Educare Centers provide continuity of care: a child will be with the same teachers from birth to 3, then move to one preschool classroom for ages 3 to 5. Four master teachers (two for preschool, two for infants and toddlers) provide hands-on supervision to the teaching staff.



Aerial view of Educare of Chicago

Finance, Governance and Evaluation: Construction costs for Educare Centers have ranged from \$4.1 million (Chicago, 2000) to \$5.3 million (Omaha, 2003) to \$5.2 million (Milwaukee, 2005) to \$5.6 million (Tulsa, 2006) to \$7.4 million (Denver, 2007) to \$7.1 million (Oklahoma City, 2008/9), not including furniture, equipment, legal or architectural fees. The centers are about the same size, but costs increase as time passes; plus, costs vary as locations change and land arrangements differ.

The centers are about 30,000 square feet in size. Annual, full-year operating budgets range from \$2.6 million to \$3 million. As a rule of thumb, the federal government can be expected to provide about half of the total, mainly through Head Start and Early Head Start. The center's director is accountable to an Educare governance board representing all major stakeholders in the project, including parents. Each Educare site also signs a network partnership agreement committing to display the Educare icon and participate in evaluation activities. The Frank Porter Graham Institute at the University of North Carolina is overseeing the national evaluation of the Educare Centers in the Bounce Learning Network. In addition, each Educare site hires a Ph.D. to serve as a local evaluation partner. The evaluation will document implementation and outcomes of Educare programs – measuring progress toward fully implementing Educare's core features and assessing ultimate impact with young children and families. Early returns from our most fully implemented sites are encouraging; but each Educare Center is committed to continuous exploration and learning – doing all we can to ensure that more disadvantaged infants, toddlers and preschoolers grow up eager to learn and better prepared for school.

For more information, contact Buffett Early
Childhood Fund at info@buffettearly.org

